

I fortunately had the opportunity to use this guide in the field on a short excursion to Khao Yai National Park and found it most useful. The arrangement of the birds is excellent and the plastic laminated cover wonderfully protects the book against rain and field wear. Frustratingly, though, I did not see many of the fine species illustrated in the book. Thus I look forward to another visit to Thailand and will be bringing *Bird Guide of Thailand* with me as an indispensable part of my gear.

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Box 229

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6. Primates of South Asia: Ecology, Sociobiology, and Behaviour: M.L. Roonwal and S.M. Mohnot, Harvard University Press, 1977. xviii + 420 pp. US\$ 22.50.

Roonwal and Mohnot have compiled data on laboratory and field studies of the behaviour of the 25 species of primates which inhabit their home ground of South Asia, an area stretching from the Afghan-Russian border to the Burmese-Thai border. The book is reviewed here because 12 of these species occur in Thailand. In their introduction the authors outline several behavioural aspects of the order Primates as a whole, and describe the South Asian region. The body of the text deals with each species in turn, giving basic anatomical data, a summary of behavioural studies, and a list of references. There is a distribution map and a thumbnail sketch of each species.

'Ah!', I said as I picked up the book, 'An up-to-date handbook of the primates of the region. How nice.' Sadly, I was soon disillusioned. In the introduction, most of the main features of primates, such as their sociality and their failure to colonise most of the temperate region, are duly stated. The inclusion of the term 'sociobiology' in the title soon turns out to be unwarranted, however, for the authors' approach is structural and not evolutionary. Almost none of the much discussed literature on primate

sociobiology in particular and on the science of sociobiology in general is cited. Peculiar views are expressed with no justification: 'The existence of territory in the strict sense has not been clearly established in primates'. Territory in the strict or any other sense is not defined, not a single reference is made to the huge literature on the subject, and anyway if a gibbon is not territorial, pray tell me what is!

In the species descriptions, an air of datedness is produced by the natural history approach to the information. Faced with 25 species, the reader needs help to compare them. The data on each species should be presented under set headings in such a way that the reader can quickly assess what is and is not known about each, or can easily compare species when comparable data exist. Numerical data should be placed in tables or graphs. The species should be comparably illustrated, preferably all close together as in modern bird guides. Roonwal and Mohnot have lumped all behavioural data for each species under just three headings: in the field, in captivity and miscellaneous. The almost total lack of tables and the total lack of graphs result in wholly indigestible listings, e.g. of social group sizes, which run to as much as a page in length. While the distribution maps are useful, the thumbnail sketches of the species are of little diagnostic use.

Conflicting reports from different authors are juxtaposed verbatim with no attempt at evaluation, and major points are often submerged in trivialities. There is a startling naiveté in the reporting of field studies: 'In Borneo (the long-tailed macaque) feeds on the fruits and young leaves of *Ficus*, *Dillenia*, *Diospyros*, *Koodersiodendron*, *Dracontomelon*, and several other trees ...' The authors give no hint that they are aware that Borneo contains thousands of tree species and that such an opportunistic macaque occupying much of the island must eat many hundreds of them at different times in different places. Rather than attempting to characterise the longtail's diet as a whole, they list a handful of the species it eats in one place and another.

The reports of diets incidentally raise the interesting question of why it is that species, well known from direct observation to eat plenty of leaves, are often reported by collectors to contain only fruit in their guts (e.g. 28

long-tailed macaques shot by Fooden in northern Thailand). One can hardly believe that the fibrous leaves are digested so quickly and completely by unspecialised guts as to vanish soon after eating.

Although it covers only the authors' home ground, this 1977 publication contains very few references later than 1972 and few references to work in progress during the intervening years. This is no idle quibble: great advances, especially in field studies, have been made during those years. The entire Smithsonian primate programme in Sri Lanka, including the uniquely rigorous ecological work of the Hladiks published in 1972 and 1975, is ignored.

In sum, Roonwall and Mohnot have amassed a very useful body of data and references, but it is out of date in content and outlook, descriptive rather than analytical, and poorly presented. One is left with the feeling that the authors simply did not make an effort to get up to date or to organise their book to suit the reader. This reader resents being made to do the authors' work.

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7. A Field Study on Sumatran Orang Utans by H.D. Rijksen. Communication no. 78-2 of the Agricultural University, Wageningen, Netherlands (1978). 420 pp, 22 tables and 161 figures.

The orang utan is the world's largest truly tree-living creature, confined today to the rain forests of Borneo and Sumatra. Whatever you may wish to know about the Sumatran orang, Rijksen doubtless says something on the subject in this comprehensive book, which is in fact his doctoral thesis. It begins with introductory chapters about the orang, about previous field research on it and about the Sumatran environment. It moves on to the ecology of the orang and, briefly but pertinently, that of the other monkeys and apes which live in the study area. An exhaustive description follows of the orang's social behaviour, and then a discussion of the role of natural selection in shaping its way of life. The book ends with a strong section on conservation.